

Management & Leadership

POLICY

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GOVERNANCE

for South African Schools

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SM&L

is published 10 times per year by Ednews. It is editorially and financially independent and it is not affiliated to any organisation. It seeks to provide the leaders of South African schools with current and relevant information on issues of policy, leadership, management and governance.

It's time to get back to work

By the time this edition gets to you, the 2010 World Cup will be over and it will be back to work for everyone who is involved with schools. In many schools, principals and their SMTs will find themselves faced with a significant challenge in their efforts to re-establish a culture of self-discipline and a sound work ethic in their schools. We provide some advice on how best to achieve this in the article entitled "Getting everyone back to work" which starts on page 2. This article was also distributed in an edition of **SM&L Update** which was distributed to all of our subscribers for whom we have e-mail addresses. If you are a subscriber with an e-mail address and did not receive this copy of **SM&L Update**, please forward your e-mail address to us and we will update our records accordingly.

Also in this edition are two articles dealing with the work of the district offices which PEDs have established to support and serve schools at a regional, district and local level. The first article is based on information carried in a research report prepared by Carolyn McKinney and published by the HSRC about the role of districts in the South African schooling system. It provides good insight into the many challenges that districts face and helps explain why so many of them are unable to provide the kind of support that schools should be able to expect from them. The second article dealing with district issues provides evidence of the inept service and poor quality of curriculum materials that some district offices attempt to impose on their schools. The district office in question is the Nkangala Regional Office in Mpumalanga, which in the last week of last term issued schools with common test papers of such a poor standard that some schools rightly refused to use them.

Improving pupil performance should be at the heart of the work of all schools and we have highlighted some of the key ingredients for achieving this for secondary schools that serve mostly disadvantaged communities in the article, "Secondary schools success in challenging circumstances". The information comes from a report produced by Ofsted, the English equivalent of our own National Education and Evaluation Unit (NEEDU), which incidentally has just appointed Prof. John Volmink, the Chairperson of Umalusi, as its CEO.

All this and more – we hope you enjoy the read and are able to use some of what you glean from these articles in the good work that you do. ■

Leadership

Getting everyone back to work

With 5 weeks of holiday and the World Cup now over, it is time to get everyone back to work!

The five-week mid-year break coupled with the excitement of our hosting of the 2010 World Cup is likely to result in pupils and teachers returning to school with a mind-set that is at odds with the work that needs to be done in what remains of the academic year. Principals and their SMTs will need to take urgent and proactive steps from the very first day of the new term if 2010 is not going to be a lost year for the majority of pupils. As mentioned in our previous edition¹ evidence from research conducted in the USA has shown that the long summer break at the end of their academic year sets back the learning of children in certain key areas and that children from more disadvantaged communities and those learning through English as a second language are most affected by this. While the studies in the USA are based on a summer break of approximately 12 weeks at the end of the academic year, this does not necessarily negate their relevance to our current situation. This year's winter break though much shorter, at just 5 weeks, is positioned in the middle of the academic year and as a result may limit the ability of pupils to recover their "lost learning" and complete the work and achieve the standards necessary for them to progress to the next grade. There are after all just over 4 months remaining to complete the work of the 2010 academic year. For the Grade 12s who have 67 days of schooling left before they write their first paper on 25 October, the matter is more dire, particularly if one takes into consideration that at least 10 of these days will be utilized for their September "Mock Matric" examinations.

Given these challenges, it is imperative that principals - with the support of their SMTs - get everyone working from the very first day of the new term. The school's leadership team needs to set the tone in this regard. Below are some suggestions on what can be done to help get your school back to work and with a strong academic focus.

1 Schedule a meeting of the SMT for the day before the start of the new term.

If you have not already scheduled such a meeting, then do so as a matter of urgency. Stress to them the urgency of the matter and the need for every member to be present. If this is not possible, then insist that the SMT meets immediately after school on the first day of the new term.

2 Make "Getting the school back to work" the only item on the agenda.

Remember as principal it is up to you to set the tone. Make sure that you are well prepared for the meeting and be quite clear in your own mind about what you expect from teachers and pupils starting from their first day back. At meetings of this kind it is easy to become distracted by other pressing matters so it is important that you take the lead in ensure that the meeting remains focused on the things that need to be done to get everyone back to work.

3 Make your expectations quite clear to members of the SMT.

Think carefully about what you expect from your teachers and pupils and how will ensure that people are doing what you are asking of them. Insist on the following as a minimum:

- Teachers arrive at school at least 10 minutes before the start of the school day and that they are in class ready to teach at the start of every lesson. This includes lessons immediately after breaks or following "free/non-teaching" periods.
- Teachers are fully prepared for every lesson that they teach and that they link their lesson content either to relevant sections in the textbooks used by pupils or to relevant notes that they have provided.
- Homework, based on the work that is covered in class or in preparation for the next day's lesson, is set on a daily basis for all Grade 10 - 12 pupils. Insist that pupils in the junior grades be set specific reading, writing and calculating tasks as homework every day. Teachers must also check on a daily basis that the set homework has been completed and provide additional assistance for those who need help or who are unable to complete the homework that is set.
- Establish a system to monitor that teachers meet this requirement by having SMT members check a sample of pupil books each day to see that homework had been set and completed. Teachers who fail to set homework need to be challenged and required to explain why they are not following the instructions of their leadership team.





- Classrooms are neat, clean and ready to receive pupils on the first day of the term. Take the SMT on a walk-through of the school, if necessary taking note of any classrooms that are not sufficiently clean or where furniture such as desks and tables may be inadequate or insufficient. Where there are shortcomings, delegate one or more members of the SMT with the task of ensuring that all shortcomings are rectified, preferably before the start of school on the first day but if this is not possible, before they leave for home at the end of the first day.

* If your school that provides pupils with free stationery and textbooks make sure that an additional supply of these items is available for use by pupils who may have misplaced or lost their books during the course of the holidays. This will ensure that even the most disorganised pupils are in a position to participate actively in class from the start of the first day.

Part of the discussion at the SMT meeting should focus on how best to re-establish a sense of order and academic focus in the school. This is best achieved if senior members of staff adopt a high profile during the course of the first week, making sure that they are not only visible in corridors and playgrounds between lessons and during breaks but that they make their presence felt, ensuring that pupils move promptly between classes and behave appropriately and in accordance with the school's code of conduct. This is also one of the best ways of monitoring whether teachers are punctual and whether they are in class and teaching when they should be.

4 Prepare a detailed programme for the first two weeks of the term which sets out your expectations and which includes dates and deadlines for the following:

- A staff meeting (after normal school hours!) to inform teachers of your expectations of them and of the school for the remainder of the term. This meeting should take place on the first afternoon of the new term where this is feasible.
- Weekly meetings of subject teams under the leadership of subject heads, if this is not standard procedure for your school. The purpose of these meetings should be to monitor the extent of "learning loss" – specific critical knowledge and skills that pupils have forgotten as a result of the long holiday break – and to develop strategies to remedy this, as well as to plan their teaching and assessment programmes for the remainder

of the term. In primary schools these meeting should take place under the leadership of phase or grade heads and should involve all the teachers who teach the respective phase or grade.

- Weekly meetings for the SMT if this is not standard procedure for your school.
- The system that will be used to monitor teacher and pupil attendance and late-coming and the setting and checking of homework.
- A test schedule for the second week of term which makes provision for a test in each subject for every pupil during one of their normal timetabled lessons so as not to disrupt the normal teaching programme. Teachers must set these tests to assess key knowledge and skills that should have been learned during the course of Terms one and two. The purpose of these tests is threefold:
 - they will force pupils to revise the work covered during the first two terms
 - they will reinforce stated objective of getting the school back to work
 - they will provide pupils and teachers with feedback on whether or not pupils have forgotten or "lost" some of what they learned in the first part of the year.

Getting staff and pupils back to work from the start of the first day of the new term will be a challenge in many schools. Initial success will depend on the vigour and determination of your leadership. You will need to set the standard in terms of your own punctuality and the rigorous and determined manner in which you monitor the performance of staff and pupils and in so doing, ensuring that your expectations are met. More than anything, you need to be seen about the school so clear your desk and stay out of your office. Patrol the corridors, clear the staffroom of teachers who should be teaching at the start of the day and after breaks and visit classrooms all the time, talking about what you expect and about the importance of getting back to work. It is you who must set the tone as if you do not, nobody else will do it. Staff will follow your lead – if you are diligent, they will be diligent and if you are tardy, they too will be tardy. ■

References

¹ Vol. 4 No. 3 pp. 6 (2010)

Research

Secondary school success in challenging circumstances

A recent publication by Ofsted, the English equivalent of our own National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU), provides valuable insights on the characteristics of secondary schools which produce excellent results despite their challenging circumstances.

A recent publication by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)¹, the English equivalent of our own National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) which is still to become fully functional, provides some useful and enlightening information on the characteristics of secondary schools which have produced excellent results despite the fact that they serve largely disadvantaged communities.

The report looked to provide some evidence-based answers to the question of, "Why it is that some schools perform brilliantly against all the odds, while others in more favourable circumstances struggle?"

The 12 schools on which the report is based were selected from a slightly larger group of secondary schools, all of which had been judged to have been outstanding in two or more inspection reports and which, despite serving disadvantaged communities, have consistently produced exceptional results for a number of years. The communities that the 12 schools serve and the profile of the pupil population of each of the schools varied considerably. At some of the schools, the pupil population is largely English-speaking and British born, while at others, the pupil population is mostly a mix of recent immigrants for whom English is a second language. Besides poverty-levels, which mean that a significant proportion of the pupils who attended these schools were entitled to free school meals, the majority of the pupils who attended the schools are exposed to the social ills which are typically associated with inner-city schools: drug and alcohol abuse, dysfunctional families with a prevalence of violence and abuse, and the presence of gangs, often with racial undertones. Yet despite these odds, the schools managed to excel.

The criteria used in selecting the schools were:

- At least two inspection reports from the last three inspections in which the school was judged to

be outstanding.

- An above-average proportion of pupils who are eligible for free meals. (*Eligibility for free meals, which is determined by the socio-economic circumstances of a child's family, is used in the UK as a measure of the poverty profile of the pupil population of a school.* Ed.)
- Outstanding grades for teaching and learning, leadership, and for the school overall in the most recent inspection report.
- High standards and a sustained trajectory of improved attainment to 2007. (*The data for the report was collected up to the end of 2007. The report was published in 2009.* Ed.)

"The schools described here show that excellence does not happen by chance. It is found in schools which have leaders of vision, courage and conviction, and the ability to create and inspire teams whose members work consistently for each other, as well as for the students and communities they serve. No effort is spared in the search for ways of doing things better."

- A pattern of "high contextual value added (CVA) scores" from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4. (*The UK's Department of Education and Skills (DoES) – the equivalent of our DBE, has a centralised database which holds records of the performance of all pupils at every level of the schooling system. It uses this data to measure the extent to*

which a school is able to "add value" to the academic attainment of those pupils who attend the school. This done by comparing the predicted future results of each pupil, based on his or her present results, with the actual achievements of each. The assumption is that good schools will add value and that pupils who attend these schools will do better than predicted, while pupils who attend underperforming school will do worse. Ed.)

The report identifies 10 "reasons" for the success of the 12 schools

- They excel at what they do, not just occasionally but for a high proportion of the time.
- They prove constantly that disadvantage need not be a barrier to achievement, that speaking English as an additional language can support academic success, and that schools really can





learning communities.

- They put pupils first, invest in their staff and nurture their communities.
- They have strong values and high expectations that are applied consistently and never relaxed.
- They fulfil individual potential by providing outstanding teaching, rich opportunities for learning, and encouragement and support for each pupil.
- They are highly inclusive, having complete regard for the educational progress, personal development and well-being of every pupil.
- Their achievements do not happen by chance, but are highly reflective, carefully planned and implemented strategies which serve these schools well in meeting the many challenges which obstruct their path to success.
- They operate with a very high degree of internal consistency.
- They are constantly looking at ways to improve further.
- They have outstanding and well-distributed leadership.

Besides these 10 points, there are a number of other interesting comments made by the author(s) of the report about the reason for the success of these schools. These include the following:

- The schools deal with the challenge of absenteeism and irregular attendance (which is of a characteristic pattern of behaviour of children from these communities) by providing an environment which is attractive to their pupils and a better day-time alternative to being at home or on the streets. As a result, pupils arrive at school “ready and willing to learn”, which is a pre-requisite for success.
- Adopting the strategies used by these schools will not necessarily result in similar levels of attainment. What is also needed is the “deep sense of purpose and commitment, courage and ambition, stemming from the leadership of the school”.
- Common themes that emerged as a result of detailed discussions with the key role-players in these schools included:
 - attention to the quality of teaching and learning;
 - the assessment and tracking of pupil progress;

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Features of schools that achieve, sustain and share excellence based on the 12 Outstanding Schools as presented in the report (p.9)

Achieving Excellence

- Having vision, values and high expectations
- Attracting, recruiting, retaining and developing staff
- Establishing disciplined learning and consistent staff behaviour
- Assuring the quality of teaching and learning
- Leading, and building leadership capacity
- Providing a relevant and attractive curriculum
- Assessment, progress-tracking and target-setting
- Inclusion: students as individuals

Sustaining Excellence

- Continuity of leadership
- Maintaining a strong team culture
- Continually developing teaching and learning
- Developing leaders
- Enriching the curriculum
- Improving literacy
- Building relationships with students, parents and the community
- No student left behind

System leadership

- Partnering another school facing difficulties and improving it
- Acting as community leader to broker relationships across other schools
- Developing and leading a successful school improvement partnership
- Working as a change agent or expert.

- target-setting;
 - support and intervention for pupils;
 - attracting teachers;
 - growing leaders.
- The schools “rigorously” applied good practice, “cleverly” adapting it to meet their specific needs. They did not innovate for innovation’s sake but would adopt and adapt innovative practices where these were seen to contribute to improving their own best practice.

In advising heads of schools which are not excelling on how the report could be used to examine their own practice, the authors suggest that they ask themselves the following questions:

- Is it a matter of being more consistent?
- Is there a need for a more rigorous tracking of progress and of providing timely support for individual pupils where this is required?
- Is it that teaching is not yet consistently good?
- Is it that the school has not asked pupils how it could better meet their needs?
- Is it that the school has limited ambition?

These are good questions and the kinds of questions that school heads, district directors and DGs should be asking themselves on a regular basis. Reflection of this kind, if it is honest, is one of the best methods of identifying the systemic weaknesses in the day-to-day functioning of the school. Once identified, provided there is the will, solutions can be devised to address these problem areas. It is this kind of process and a deep commitment to the achievement of ambitious goals that produced the kinds of results that these schools have achieved. As Christine Gilbert, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools in the UK, put it in the foreword to this publication: “The schools described here show that excellence does not happen by chance. It is found in schools which have leaders of vision, courage and conviction, and the ability to create and inspire teams whose members work consistently for each other, as well as for the students and communities they serve. No effort is spared in the search for ways of doing things better. There is passionate belief that all young people can be helped to fulfil their potential

Heads of schools which are not excelling should ask themselves the following questions:

- Is it a matter of being more consistent?
- Is there a need for a more rigorous tracking of progress and of providing timely support for individual pupils where this is required?
- Is it that teaching is not yet consistently good?
- Is it that the school has not asked pupils how it could better meet their needs?
- Is it that the school has limited ambition?

and become successful. No challenges are regarded as insurmountable; indeed, they generate innovative and effective responses. Staff are trusted and supported. They are highly motivated, enjoy their work and have access to a wealth of opportunities to develop as professionals. The schools have the hard-won respect and confidence of their communities. Most importantly, students emerge as confident and capable young people, well equipped for the next stage of their lives and highly unlikely to join the ranks of those not in education, employment or training.” ■

References

¹ *12 Outstanding Secondary Schools: Excelling against the odds*, Ofsted, Crown copyright 2009. The report can be downloaded from the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

SM&L Comment on 12 Outstanding Schools

There are too many leaders in our education system who lack the ambition and the commitment to do the kinds of things that these schools have done. Unfortunately there are also too many teachers in the system who are more interested in their conditions of employment than they are in ensuring that the pupils they teach receive the education that is their right. Regrettably, this level of self-interest, which has no place in the profession, is driven by the leaders of their unions who appear to be either disinterested in or completely oblivious to the impact that their policies and behaviour have on the quality of schooling in this country. One of the distressing consequences of this attitude is reflected in the very limited the job prospects of the majority of school-leavers because their schooling has not provided them with the basic tools that they need order to be employed in decent jobs – something the unions are constantly demanding. Less self-interest and a greater commitment to service is what is needed, not only for improved schooling but for better jobs and ultimately for a more secure and healthier economy. But are our leaders willing to make the change?

Opinion

Closing the achievement gap - is it possible?

Is it really possible to close the achievement gap between rich and poor and between those who learn through their mother tongue and those who must learn through a second or even third language?

In an article published in *Education Week*¹ Walt Gardner provides a salutary reminder of the need for honest reflection when dealing with the kinds of data that are used to measure the performance of schools serving children from different social classes and socio-economic backgrounds. The point he makes is that it is disingenuous to suggest that it is possible to close the performance gap between schools which serve children from disadvantaged communities, many of whom are learning through the medium of English as their second language, and those schools that serve children from better-off middle class homes who are taught in their mother tongue.

His article, as the title suggests, challenges the notion that it is possible to eliminate the performance gap between rich and poor and between those who learn through the medium of their mother tongue and those who learn through English as a second language.

Gardner uses a number of cogent arguments in support of his conjecture and also makes it clear that he is not suggesting that children from disadvantaged communities cannot succeed and match or even surpass their better-off peers if given the opportunity to do so. It is also not that good teachers cannot make a difference – he supports the notion that they can and do make a difference. The point he makes is that it is not possible through good schooling alone to make up the difference between the average performance of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more advantaged peers. There are several reasons he suggests for this. The first relates to the literacy and numeracy levels of children when they first enter the school system. Education data from the USA shows that children from socio-economically deprived homes typically enter kindergarten 3 months behind the national average and never catch up. The reason they never catch up, he suggests, is not because schools are not doing their job, but because their better-off contemporaries are making equally good – if not better – progress, supported by parents who for the most part not only value education but also have the means to provide their children with a richer educational experience including travel, books and additional out-of-school support where this may be needed.

Education data from the USA shows that children from socio-economically deprived homes typically enter kindergarten 3 months behind the national average and never catch up.

In the 1960s, according to Gardner, the Californian public schooling system was the envy of the nation but that since then its quality has declined “dramatically”. Critics of this decline suggest that it was brought about by the increasing power of teacher unions and a new generation of ineffective teachers. Gardner suggests that the reason may have had more to do with socio-economic factors and changes in the population profile of California. In 1965, changes in federal legislation made it possible for immigrants to be granted American citizenship more easily, which resulted in a significant increase in the number of new, relatively poor, mostly Spanish-speaking citizens.

Almost a quarter of pupils in California’s public schools now speak a language other than English (compared to 1 in 10 in most other states) with half qualifying for free or reduced-price school lunches (children

in the USA qualify for free or reduced-price lunches based on the income/poverty level of their families). The relevance of this information in terms of the ability of the American education system to “eliminate” the achievement gap” becomes clear in the light of data provided by the Public Policy Institute of California which found that just 50% of elementary schools with the highest share of poor students made adequate yearly progress in 2007 compared to 98% of elementary schools with the lowest share of poor students.

Are there lessons to be learned for South Africa from this data? We would like to think that there are. The first is that we need to stop using the results of our best public schools as the yardstick for measuring all schools. Not only is this unfair to the schools that are having to work with children from our most disadvantaged communities, it also distorts the contribution that the so-called “top” schools make to the good performance of their pupils who mostly enter the schooling system after one or more years of play-school and/or pre-school confident, in good health and with a solid grounding in the basic skills that they need to succeed. And if that were not enough, there is ready access to additional support in the form of extra-lessons and private therapists and tutors for those who may feel they are falling behind.

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Curriculum

Umalusi MEDIA release - 2009 Physical Sciences results

The final word on the 2009 Physical Sciences results 'debacle' from Umalusi.

This statement outlines the quality assurance and standardisation processes and procedures followed by Umalusi in quality assuring learner assessment in the National Senior Certificate.

Umalusi, like many other large-scale examination systems across the world, has processes and procedures in place to mitigate the impact on learner performance caused by factors other than the learner's aptitude. A large-scale examination system invariably has many and varied sources of variability from one year to the next. These include the levels of difficulty of question papers and inconsistency of marking. The main objective of standardisation is to ensure that a cohort of learners is not unduly advantaged or disadvantaged by undesirable variabilities in the national assessment.

Standardisation has been used by Umalusi's predecessors, namely the JMB¹ (1918 - 1992) and SAFCERT² (1992 - 2001). It is based on, among other things, a widely accepted assumption that, for large populations, the distribution of intelligence and aptitude does not change appreciably from one year to the next. It is therefore reasonable to expect that, all things equal, this year's cohort of learners should perform at a comparable level to last year's cohort.

The standardisation process is managed by Umalusi's Assessment Standards Committee, comprising mostly educationists and academic statisticians from a number of South African universities.

The aim of the standardisation process is to ensure that results remain at more or less the same standard over time. This further ensures equivalence of standards across subjects. The standardisation exercise is intended to deliver a relatively constant product to universities, colleges and employers.

In the standardisation process, learner raw marks may be adjusted upward, downward or left unchanged. Adjustments are normally based on averages calculated from learner performance over a particular period. This is not a purely statistical process as qualitative information, which includes external moderator and marking reports, is also used to justify any adjustments. The extent of any adjustment is regulated in terms of Umalusi policies and directives. Sparing all the technical detail, in general no adjustments should exceed 10%. It must be pointed out

that very rarely has Umalusi been required to approve the maximum adjustment.

All National Senior Certificate subject results were standardized in this manner in 2009. In particular the raw marks for Physical Sciences were compared with the "guideline" norm used in 2008 as well as the raw marks of the 2008 cohort. The Assessment Standards Committee also considered all qualitative input such as moderators' reports and research findings. The Umalusi External Moderator reports indicate that the memoranda of both papers 1 and 2 made sufficient provision to accommodate alternative answers. The monitoring of how the memorandum is interpreted and applied across the various marking centers is outside the control of Umalusi. The verification of marking reports indicates that the memorandum was applied consistently.

In its *Maintaining Standards Research Project*, Umalusi found that, measured against the Physical Sciences report 550 curriculum, the National Curriculum Statement for Physical Sciences was more challenging both in breadth (number of topics) as well as depth (Certain topics beyond the age capabilities of Grade 12 learners). The research indicated that the time allocated was insufficient to do justice to the NSC curriculum. This seemed to have a knock-on effect on the standard of the examination papers. It must be noted that the question papers were set and moderated against the prescripts of the Subject Assessment Guidelines (SAGs) developed by the Department of Basic Education, that indicate the "standard" of the question paper. The question papers approved by Umalusi's external moderator in 2009 complied with the SAGs.

Consequently, Umalusi recommended that the Department of Basic Education take immediate steps to issue an amended assessment guideline based on a reduced curriculum.

All information at Umalusi's disposal was carefully considered in making the final standardisation decisions in respect of the 2009 NSC Physical Sciences paper and Umalusi Council is satisfied with the final decisions taken. ■

For further comment on this Umalusi statement turn to page 10.

Notes

¹ Joint Matriculation Board (JMB)

² South African Certification Council (SAFCERT)

Research

Teaching reading to English second language learners – which approach works best?

Some theorists advocate an immersion model while others promote a bilingual approach. Recent research suggests that one may be as good as the other.

Recent research funded by the Institute of Education Sciences for US Department of Education¹ suggests that by the end of Grade 4 there is little difference between the English reading ability of children taught by one or other of the Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) model or the Structured English Immersion (SEI) model.

The research reports on the findings from the fifth-year results of a study which compared the English and Spanish language and reading performance of children from Spanish-speaking homes. When the children entered kindergarten, they were randomly assigned either to classes which were taught using the TBE model for English language teaching or an SEI model.

The Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) model provides children, at least initially with some - if not all - of their teaching in their mother tongue; in this case, the mother tongue of the children was Spanish. A large sector of the US population is Spanish speaking; most of the Spanish speakers are recent immigrants from the Spanish-speaking countries of South America. Spanish language teaching and learning resources are therefore readily available in the country. The children are initially taught to read only in Spanish. Teaching reading through the medium of English begins later, usually at the end of Grade 2 or the beginning of Grade 3. Most of the teaching in the early grades in the TBE model is in Spanish, although some subjects may be taught through the medium of English. In the “early exit” version of the TBE model, the transition to all-English instruction (including reading instruction) usually starts from Grades 2 or 3, while in the “late exit” versions, teaching in the child’s mother-tongue (Spanish) may continue to the end of primary school. This is to ensure their mastery of reading and content before they make the transition to all-English instruction.

The Structure English Immersion (SEI) model “immerses” the second language learners in English from the time that they start school. All teaching is through the medium of English and children are also taught to read using exclusively English texts. Children taught through the SEI model may also be placed in

classes in which the majority of children are native English speakers. Support is provided mainly through the initial use of simplified language, the teaching of specific vocabulary and other language development strategies. In some cases bilingual teacher-aids may be used to help the second-language learners by translating words into their mother tongue and providing explanations in their mother tongue where this is needed.

In the past in this country, we made use mostly of a Transitional Bilingual Model with the transition to English for the majority of second-language learners taking place from the start of Grade 4. At one stage there was a drive to extend the period of mother-tongue instruction to the end of Grade 6 but more recently there has been a move to begin the teaching of English - and particularly English reading - during the course of the Foundation phase.

What is interesting about the research which tracked the performance of the group of Spanish-speaking children who were randomly assigned to classes taught using either the TBE approach or the SEI approach is that it was found that there was little to choose between the reading levels of the two groups 5 years into the study.

The TBE children scored significantly lower than the SEI children in Grades 2 - 4 in measures of receptive vocabulary² but there was no significant difference in their reading scores. Both groups continued to improve in English receptive language skills and the authors of this research paper conclude that “Spanish-dominant students learn to read in English (as well as Spanish) equally well in TBE and SEI”.

While the findings from this research are based on work done in the USA with Spanish-speaking children, it does suggest that concerns about introducing English as a second language too early into our primary schools may be unfounded. The concerns have always been that the early introduction of English not only disrupts the development of a child’s own mother tongue but that it may also affect their early cognitive development, making them less able to operate in either language in the higher grades. This research appears

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to refute both of these assumptions as it found not only that there was no difference in the reading levels of the two groups but that these Spanish-speaking children's ability to read Spanish was also not affected by their early introduction to English as second language. Perhaps the only caveat to all of this is that one assumes that those who taught these children had English as their mother tongue, while in South Africa the majority of teachers who will be teaching English to children in the Foundation phase are likely to be teachers whose mother tongue is the same as that of their pupils. ■

References

¹ Robert E. Slaving et al. *Reading and Language Outcomes of a Five-Year Randomized Evaluation Of Transitional Bilingual Education*, Institute of Education Science, January 2010.

² The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Tests (PPVT) were used to measure "receptive" vocabulary while reading ability was measured using the Woodcock Reading Scales.

Closing the achievement gap - is it possible?

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The second is to establish a system of individual performance benchmarks for all schools which can measure the extent to which the school is making progress in terms of improved performance in the key areas of numeracy and literacy for primary schools and in Languages and Mathematics for high schools. This is not to diminish the value of other subjects but because of the clear evidence that mastery of basic literacy and numeracy is a prerequisite for academic success in all subjects.

The soon-to-be introduced systemic assessment for Grades 3, 6, and 9 could serve as the basis for a benchmarking exercise of this kind. Once these benchmarks have been established, rating schools in terms of their progress in improving their performance against these benchmarks will provide a far better measure of the quality of their performance than any of the current systems of evaluating the performance of individual schools. It will also make it more difficult for schools to use the socio-economic status of the community and lack of resources as an excuse for their failure to improve their results. Setting challenging benchmarks for the better-resourced schools serving more affluent communities may also make them look to their laurels and be less self-satisfied about their achievements. ■

References

¹ Walt Gardner, *Eliminating the Achievement Gap Is Educational Alchemy*, Education Week, 21 May 2010

SM&L Comment on Umalusi statement

This UMALUSI press release on the 2009 NSC Physical Sciences results brings (as its title suggests) an end to the possibility of any further review or official discussion on the quality of the papers, the accuracy and consistency of the marking, the rigour of the moderation process and the equity of the adjustment process. The statement appears to have identified just two problem areas from those over which UMALUSI has some measure of control. They are the scope and breadth of the curriculum and, to a lesser extent, the standard of the papers. The first problem has already been addressed by the DBE which, during the course of May, issued a circular to PEDs for distribution to schools, amending the Physical Sciences and Mathematics curricula for the 2010 NSC examinations. Clearly it is not possible to address the second problem retrospectively and one must assume that the matter of the difficulty of the paper will be dealt with by paying greater attention to the standard and syllabus coverage of future papers.

While this may well be the last word on the aberrant 2009 NSC Physical Sciences results, it is unlikely to satisfy the Heads of Science, Science teachers and principals of those schools which have in the past consistently produced the best results in Physical Sciences and Mathematics and whose pupils go on to become the engineers, scientists and doctors that this country so desperately needs. They were left bewildered by the dramatic decline in the 2009 results of their candidates and particularly in the results of their most able pupils. These committed and responsible teachers are likely to see this response as a challenge to the professional integrity and the quality of the work that they do. For if the blame was not with the paper or the quality of the marking, then the only other credible explanation is that the teachers were at fault and that somehow between 2008 and 2009 there was a collective lapse in the quality of their teaching and the thoroughness of the manner in which they prepared their pupils for the examinations. If this be true, then Science education in this country is in deep trouble. There is, of course, one other explanation. It is called humility – or more the lack of it on the part of the powers that be: a view that says we would rather shaft our best teachers than admit that we made a mistake because we are too important to be seen to be making mistakes. We leave it to you, our readers, to decide the most plausible explanation. ■

Research

Why our districts are failing to support teaching and learning

Recent research helps explain why most district offices seem unable to provide the kinds of support that schools need.

A recently published report¹ based on a literature review of the role of districts in the South African schooling system provides valuable insights into the severe challenges that most districts face and helps explain either why most are ineffective at providing the kind of support that schools need or why they are indifferent to those needs.

The picture that the report paints is of a system that is largely in disarray, mostly as a result of the absence of a clear policy framework and national directives explaining what it is that districts are supposed to do. The absence of national policy has meant that each province has done its own thing, which explains amongst other things why the titles and duties of district officials vary so much from province to province. It would also explain why nobody seems to really know what they are expected to be doing.

Even the concept of a “District Office” varies from province to province. In KZN there are three layers of organisation hierarchy (“Regional offices”, “District offices” and “Circuit offices”) between the provincial head office and schools. The other provinces have either two layers or one layer of hierarchy, with no consistency in what these structures are called or what they do. Some seem to be concerned mostly with staffing and administrative issues, while others are expected to provide a whole range of services to schools, including curriculum services and support for teachers.

Carolyn McKinney, the author of the report, uses evidence from a range of recent studies to describe the kinds of tasks that the personnel are involved in, explaining why it is that their work is not having a meaningful impact on the schools, particularly in relation to improving pupil performance. This is then contrasted with what the literature suggests should be the work of districts if they aim to achieve sustained improvement in the schools that they are expected to serve and support.

The evidence that she presents suggests that the role and function of districts vary but they are likely to include most, if not all, of the following:

- Administrative support for schools
- Support in the governance and management of schools

- Curriculum support and monitoring, including learner assessment
- Human resources and labour relations
- The delivery of learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs)
- The provision of psychological and social services
- Support for pupils with special educational needs (LSEN)
- Support of cultural and sporting activities
- The administering the Grade 12 examination.

It is an extensive list and it would be wonderful if districts were able to provide schools with meaningful support in all of these areas. Unfortunately, however, the evidence suggests that the work of districts is directed mostly at ensuring the schools comply with policy rather than in promoting and supporting quality teaching and learning. This focus on policy adherence by districts is not surprising given the large number of new policies that have been enacted and amended over the past few years - policies which have had a direct bearing on the work of districts and the functioning of schools. Unfortunately as a consequence of this, many schools perceive districts as nothing more than “messengers and post-offices” for their PED “passing down directives through endless circulars, as well as through workshops and school visits, and passing upwards evidence of compliance”.

A number of the sources referred to in the report caution against the use of “accountability” models of school improvement. This approach, as its title suggests, looks to hold principals, teachers and district officials accountable for pupil performance and by implication includes the possible use of sanction and reward for those involved - depending on the performance of those schools, principals, teachers and pupils who fall under their authority. It is a typical business model and one that is currently popular with politicians. Advocates of this kind of a model adopt the common-sense view that holding people accountable and rewarding them for good results encourages them to work hard and to improve performance. In the case of schools the results pupils achieve in externally-set

Continued on page 12

and moderated tests are used as the measure of performance and rewarding the schools for good results is seen as the best way of driving improved teaching and better results. It is a good idea in theory but of course not easy to implement in practice because children are not widgets and each arrives at school with a unique set of personal circumstances. The other problem with use of accountability models as a school improvement strategy is that these models assume that teachers, principals and district officials have the knowledge and competencies that they need to bring about the required improvement. This is clearly not the case if the various papers cited in the report are correct in their findings.

One of the worrying features of what has been thrown up by the research is that most districts appear not to have the either the capacity or the competence to provide schools with the kind of support that they need to improve. Roberts², whose studies are frequently cited in the report, makes the point that the “core function” of district offices is “to support the delivery of the curriculum and to ensure that all learners are afforded good quality learning opportunities – the quality of which is evidenced in learner achievement.’ He suggests that the failure of districts to perform this function has to do with their lack of focus and their inability to be both organisationally (i.e. in their internal functioning) and instructionally effective. Adding to the problem is the view from the authors of another study³ who make the point that “interventions ‘rarely create adequate conditions for teachers to learn about or develop the knowledge, skills and beliefs needed to enact these interventions successfully in the classroom””.

Impediments to the effective work of districts

The report identifies 6 factors which militate against the effective functioning of school districts.

Continual restructuring

District offices appear to bear the brunt of PED restructuring processes, with some districts having gone through the process five times. As one would expect, the constant restructuring distracts the officials from their main task of supporting skills and the report provides evidence from the Quality Learning Project (QLP)⁴ that “learner performance in non-restructured environments (at district level) was almost always at a higher level than in restructured environments”.

Lack of capacity

The lack of capacity at district offices refers to capacity in both human capacity and the adequacy of

resources. The problems faced by rural districts are particularly severe, partly because of their inability to attract appropriately qualified and skilled staff. As a result, they are often understaffed or are forced to employ subject advisors who have no teaching experience. Districts facing these kinds of challenges are clearly not in a position to provide the kinds of professional support to schools that they need. What makes matters worse is that the schools that they serve are most likely to be those which are most in need of support. Over and above their shortcomings in terms of human capacity, these same districts are likely to be faced with further constraints because of the inadequacy of the physical resources that are put at their disposal. These include inadequate provision of such things as computers, photocopiers, phone lines and stable e-mail access.

Inadequate management and administrative systems

The absence of national and provincial policies and/or policy guidelines defining the roles and responsibilities of districts has already been referred to. This absence of a clear mandate not only creates confusion about how districts should function but also befuddles their relationship with schools. The question of their “authority” in relation to schools is often challenged by the principals of well-functioning schools, particularly when district officials try to force schools to abide by policies which have been drawn up at district level and which principals consider to be problematic.

Equally problematic is the apparent failure of most districts to capture and maintain updated records of pupil and staff data from their schools. Prinsloo and Kadjee⁵ in their report on the QLP found that “There is a general paucity of data on schools and students and records of school monitoring are virtually non-existent”.

Lack of alignment

The lack of alignment refers to the relationship between districts and the PED and DBE. Districts apparently often receive information late and/or conflicting information from different provincial and national directorates. Because districts work directly with schools, they are at the receiving end of criticism about late notification and conflicting instructions. In an effort to moderate the impact of these problems, districts apparently amend or re-interpret the information in an attempt to make it more palatable to schools. It is their efforts in this regard that attracted the criticism that was directed at them by the Ministerial Committee which reviewed the National Curriculum Statement and criticised districts for “layering” national and provincial policy documents. “Layering” refers to a tendency by district officials to re-interpret policy





documents – often incorrectly – and to their penchant for adding further requirements to the documents, all of which made the documents more administratively burdensome for teachers and schools.

Lack of authority

Although districts are expected to deal with a range of administrative and human resource management processes on behalf of their schools, the authority to make decisions in relation to these processes apparently resides in their provincial head office. The lengthy delays that schools experience in staff appointments, the procurement of goods and services and the repair and maintenance of buildings amongst other things can all be attributed to this lack of real decision-making powers at district level.

Lack of budget

This is closely linked to the lack of authority at district level. There are many districts, apparently, which have neither budgets nor decision-making power over expenditure and as a consequence are not able to provide schools with even the most basic level of support where costs may be involved.

Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations for improving the basic functionality of district offices with a focus on improving their ability to support schools in a way that will improve teaching and learning. The following extract from part of the preliminary statement to these recommendations highlights the extent of the problem and the urgency of the need to do something about it.

“Based on existing evidence, it is clear that despite the range of functions carried out by districts, whether these are well-functioning district offices or poorly functioning ones, the provision of meaningful support to schools focused on improving teaching and learning (and learner performance) is weak. Strategic thinking on how to improve district capacity to support schools in teaching and learning is urgently required.

It goes on to make the following recommendations:

1 Audit District and Circuit office functionality

The audit should include the following:

- staffing, including number of staff, their qualifications, years of experience and levels of expertise and job descriptions;
- physical resources including the availability of *inter alia* phone lines, internet access, computers and photocopiers;
- Record-keeping and the implementation and use of EMIS.

It also suggests that, based on the results of the audit, district offices be classified as “failing”, “moderately effective or “effective”.

2 Approach restructuring with caution

This is because research suggests not only that district office restructuring seldom improves teaching and learning but that it frequently has a negative impact on the ability of districts to service schools.

3 Leadership

There is a need for strong “strategic” leadership which is able to focus the work of districts on improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools. The leadership would also need to drive efforts to improve the capacity of district office staff to provide schools with appropriate levels of support.

4 Align district structure and functioning with staffing

The district staffing allocation needs to be sufficient to meet the needs of schools, particularly in relation to subject-based support. Subject advisors who are appointed must have sufficient subject expertise to provide teachers with meaningful support. This may require additional training for subject advisors. Part of this recommendation includes the need to separate the monitoring function to ensure policy compliance, from the support function so as to avoid the negativity associated with idea of “inspection”.

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SM&L Comment on Districts report

Carolyn McKinney’s report on the role and functioning of districts provides an excellent overview of the current state of state of regional, district and circuit offices in this country and highlights the huge problems that exist at this important level in the DBE. District offices are currently the only operational structures within the DBE that are sufficiently close to schools to make the kinds of interventions that are required for systemic school reform directed at improving the quality of teaching and learning - and ultimately, improved pupil outcomes. There is a compelling and urgent need for the DBE to address the challenges that she has identified. The process should be started immediately and can begin with the chartering of a policy framework which clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of district offices.

Opinion

How districts get it wrong

The inept management and poor standards manifest in some districts undermine the status and authority of the district office and officials in the eyes of the schools that they have been established to serve.

We were recently provided with an example of how inept management and poor standards undermine the status and authority of districts and district officials in the eyes of the schools that they have been established to serve.

Our story concerns schools in the Nkangala Region of Mpumalanga. The schools were contacted by their circuit manager and told that there were items that needed to be collected from him at the circuit office. This method of distributing items to schools seems to be a common practice in many districts. What is puzzling about this process is the assumption that schools must take responsibility for the delivery of items that emanate from the District Office. Still worse is the fact that there is an expectation in some quarters that this fetching and carrying is the responsibility of the principal. One must assume that this is because the principal does less teaching than the rest of his or her staff and therefore is more likely to have the time to do this fetching and carrying, which inevitably happens during the school day. Of course if the school is not far from the District or Circuit Office, the round trip may be accomplished in less than half an hour; but where the distances are great (as in the case of many rural districts) or where traffic is heavy (as happens in many of our bigger cities) the round trip may take most of the school day. The worst example of how this simple act of collecting an item from district office can consume the time of principals concerns a small primary school on the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape, where because of the distances involved and the state of the roads, the principal is forced to miss two days of school every time he is required to collect an item from his District Office. One must also assume that the principal is able to submit a claim for the use of his vehicle and for other subsistence and travel expenses. We have also no doubt that the system is open to abuse and that there are principals that use it as a reason for not being at their schools during the school day when they are supposed to be there.

QUESTION 6

From the Grade 6 Technology paper

Complete the following table:

Kind of food	Ways of preserving food in the olden days	Alternative ways of preserving food in the modern days
1. Fish	1.	1.
2. Pears	2.	2.
3. Milk	3.	3.
4. Meat	4.	4.
5. Vegetables (spinach)	5.	5.

[10]

QUESTION 6

KIND OF FOOD	WAYS OF PRESERVING IN THE OLDEN DAYS	ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF PRESERVING IN THE MODERN WAYS
1. Fish	Drying/Canning	Making tuna
2. Pears	Canning/Drying	Dried fruits/Making baby food-Purity
3. Milk	Put bottle in a clay pot full of water	Pasteurize
4. Meat	Drying/Coating	Freezing/Refrigerating
5. Vegetables	Drying	Freezing

QUESTION 2

The following materials react to fire and water. Tick the relevant ones

	WATER	FIRE
1. Wood		
2. Paper		
3. Plastic		
4. Clay		
5. Cotton		

[10]

QUESTION 2

Material	Water	Fire
1. Wood	√	√
2. Paper	√	
3. Plastic		√
4. Clay	√	
5. Cotton		√

[10]

In this instance the District Office is in an urban area, so collecting the items was not a major problem. What was a problem, however, was that the items to be collected consisted of a set of "Common Assessment Tasks" (CATs?) – not for Grade 9, as these have now been discontinued – but for Grades 3 and 6. Some schools were told to collect the items on 2 June, exactly one week before

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schools were due to close on 9 June, together with verbal instructions that they be written before the end of the term. Some schools were apparently issued with covering letters which included specific dates on which the papers were to be written, with some of these dates preceding the date on which the assessment tasks were issued to schools. Late notification was not the only problem with the issuing of these documents; worse was the quality of the assessment tasks – essentially 1-hour tests – that had been set. They were full of errors and the quality of many of the questions was poor, as was the quality of the presentation. They are certainly not models of good practice which is what you would expect from a District Office. On this and the adjacent page we have provided some of examples of the kinds of problems to which we are referring.

The question we need to confront is whether what has happened in the Nkangala Region is an aberration, confined to this district, whether it is confined to Mpumalanga which recent events suggest is one of the most dysfunctional of the provincial education departments, or whether it is fairly typical of a basic dysfunctionality of the majority of districts across the country. Based on the evidence of Carolyn McKinney's¹ report which we carry elsewhere in this edition, we suspect the last-mentioned, which is not to say that there not a few well-run districts which provide their schools with a high standard of service.

If we are right in our conjecture that the majority of Education Districts do not have the necessary capacity to support the schools that they are supposed to serve in a meaningful way, then fixing districts should become a priority for both the DBE and the PEDs because improving schooling at a systemic level is not possible if education districts are not functional. As we have stated elsewhere in this edition, as a first step, the DBE needs to establish, as a matter of urgency, a policy framework which defines the function, status and authority of districts and the roles and responsibilities of the officials who are to populate the district offices. A second requirement is to ensure that those appointed to these posts have the requisite experience, knowledge and skills to provide schools with the support that they need. This

is likely to require a substantial investment of time and money but it is likely to be money well spent, provided the training is properly focused on improving specific identified skills. The third need is for a district by district audit of basic functionality so that failing districts, like failing schools, can be put under some form of curatorship, or simply shut down, until they have the personnel and capacity to perform the work that is required of them. This may sound harsh but dysfunctional districts do more harm than good, frustrating the teachers and principals of better schools by their actions while allowing lethargy and ineptitude to flourish at underperforming schools through their inefficiency and poor example. ■

QUESTION 4 (LO4:Ass 3)

From the Grade 6 EMS paper

1. What is an advertising campaign?

2. True of False:

- 2.1 Businesses that are production orientated produce products like plumbing and garden services. _____
- 2.2 Businesses that are services orientated produce services like looking after pets. _____
- 2.3 Marketing means advertising a product so that the market has more knowledge about the product or service. _____
- 2.4 Data should not be organised. _____
- 2.5 Newspapers are a type of marketing media that you can easily make yourself. _____

QUESTION 4

1. It is to create to create a promotion for a product/service that will be profitable for yhe entrepreneur needed by the aiming market.

- 2. 1 False ✓
- 2.2 True ✓
- 2.3 True ✓
- 2.4 False ✓
- 2.5 False ✓

(10)

3. Explain the following sentence about marketing.

WHO says **WHAT**, **TO WHOM**, through which **MEDIUM**, and what **EFFECT** does it have on them?

WHO: _____
WHAT: _____
TO WHOM: _____
MEDIUM: _____
EFFECT: _____

- 3. **WHO** _ Entrepreneur ✓
- WHAT** _ Product/Service ✓
- To Whom** _ To those that are interested in my product. ✓
- MEDIUM** _ How is my aiming market going to know my product/service ✓
- EFFECT** _ Impact of my advert on my new clients. ✓

(15)

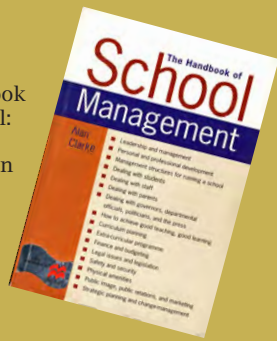
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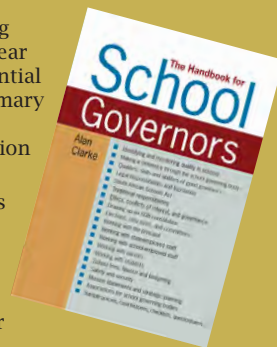
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Kate McCallum

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5 National policy on district functions

There is a need for a clear national policy framework to guide the structure and work of districts. The author of the report suggests that those responsible for formulating such a policy framework should use the *South African Schools Act* as a guideline, particularly in relation to the way in which Section 21 of SASA makes it possible for schools to be assigned different levels of responsibility and authority over such things as budgeting and financial control over the allocation and spending of funds. She also points out that one of the advantages of a policy framework is that it can provide guidance on appropriate organisational structures ("organograms") and job-descriptions of district personnel. ■

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- ⁵ Ibid as quoted in the report on page 14.

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